

# BMN TRIP REPORT

## Hayward Lake (October 18, 2009)

Mark Johnston



Mark taking in Hayward Lake and the fall colours from Ruskin Dam. (Photo by Ian McArthur)

On Sunday, October 18 -- a day that began in cloud (it had rained overnight) and eventually saw some sun -- four of us hiked the 17-km route around Hayward Lake. We started and finished our hike at Ruskin Dam. Due to construction underway to upgrade the dam, there is currently no vehicle access across the dam. Thus, as we walked across the dam from east to west, we had the roadway to ourselves and were able to stop midway and contemplate the lake without distraction. The lake's surface was still and mirror-like; its treed shoreline a mixture of forest green and autumnal orange. A trio of young gulls flew over our heads and down the Stave River.

After absorbing the view, we made our way along the water's edge to the Railway Trail, which for the most part follows an old railway alignment along the west side of the lake. (The original alignment, prior to the building of any dams, ran alongside the river and now lies underwater at the bottom of Hayward Lake Reservoir). We started along the

right-of-way, occasionally leaving it to work our way around creek mouths and small bays -- features formerly bridged by trestles, the remains of which continue to provide mute testament to a bygone era. Although our deviations from the right-of-way meant we had to do a little climbing, we found ourselves as a result, walking through some lovely stretches of forest where sizeable Douglas-firs rise above an understory dense with sword ferns. I heard a nuthatch calling; we also heard chickadees chattering away. Back out in the open, we watched as crows noisily pursued two ravens.

As we walked along the west side of the lake, we stopped to read the various interpretive signs and to look out over the reservoir's calm waters. In many places snags rise above the surface like so many pilings. In about two hours' time, we came to the pretty little pond near the North Beach Recreation Area. We observed some ducks on the far side of the pond but did not take the time to identify them. Closer at hand, we watched a brown creeper spiral up the thick trunk of a large Sitka spruce. At the recreation area we found a picnic table and ate some of our lunch. There were the

occasional dog walkers passing by, but the area was mostly very quiet.



When we resumed hiking, we found that the next bit of trail now departs from the original route. Instead of following the road over the top of Stave Falls Dam, the new route crosses a bridge below the dam and its powerhouse and joins the road east of the dam. We paused on the bridge to watch a kingfisher fly away, first alerted to its presence by its loud dry rattle. A little farther along, we studied an old boom boat anchored just downstream from the powerhouse. And when we finally reached the roadway, we took a few moments to walk back to the middle of the dam and look up the long west arm of vast Stave Lake.

**Big cedar, trailside, on the Reservoir Trail. (Photo by Ian McArthur)**

After our detour to look up Stave Lake, we headed east along the roadway and crossed Blind Slough Dam. Once again, while crossing, we paused to take in the view. Looking south, we noted the dam's spillway and the rocky, potholed riverbed. Somewhere along this stretch we saw a great blue heron disappearing downriver.

On the other side of Blind Slough Dam, we gained most of our elevation for the day, finally reaching a viewpoint looking out over the area between lake and dams, an area bisected by transmission lines. Then we dropped down past Brown and Steelhead creeks, and by means of a side-trail descended even further to a well-built platform from which we could look back upstream toward beautiful Steelhead Falls. The falling water, milky white as it rushes through a narrow rocky trough, becomes greenish-white as it braids and broadens, spilling over a number of ledges separated by increasingly greater intervals of rockface. We decided to stay a while and savour the view as we finished the rest of our lunch.



**One of the many bridges on the Reservoir Trail. (Photo by Ian McArthur)**

Sufficiently sated, both literally and figuratively, we continued our clockwise loop, now on the Reservoir Trail. This trail features numerous bridges and benches -- in one place, a Bunyanesque picnic table and wraparound bench -- each improvement a distinct work of art. Handrails are fashioned from naturally curving small trunks or branches; benches are carved out of stumps or logs. The second-growth forest is also remarkable. In some sections trees and ground are so covered with mosses, it's as if a natural Midas had turned everything green; in other sections ferns predominate: we identified sword, spiny wood, licorice, and deer fern. Although birds were not plentiful, we saw or heard juncos, (possibly) kinglets, and more chickadees. More than a few times, we heard ravens croaking.

Part way along, we came across extensive patches of a “three-leaved” plant. We noted that virtually every one these plants displayed leaves that appeared to have been “chewed.” A couple of us thought the plant might be trillium, but the others weren’t so sure. Then one of us discovered a lone three-leaved plant, with a somewhat narrower leaf, growing in the midst of the others, which had a broader leaf. This plant, with the narrower leaf, was unmistakably a trillium. Now we puzzled as to what the other species with the broader leaf could be. It looked so familiar, yet we couldn’t place it. Don collected a specimen and later (after checking guidebooks at home) identified it as vanilla-leaf. How could we have missed this!

In time, we returned to lake level at Canoe Landing. We walked out onto the floating dock, had a snack, and amused ourselves by feeding microscopic bits of trail mix to a dozen or so trout of various sizes swimming just below the water surface.

The last part of the hike was a little bit like a rollercoaster ride. After another stint in the forest, we dropped steeply down to lake level again, crossing Hairsine Inlet on the substantially-built floating bridge. Then, we had to ascend yet one more rise. We finished by descending again, this time on a dirt road reminiscent of a country lane. Back at Ruskin Dam, I took one more look up the lake, its waters just as unrippled as when we had begun.